DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 397 429 CS 215 395

AUTHOR Swaffield, Bruce C.
TITLE What Happens When Male Professors Enact Feminist Pedagogies?
PUB DATE Mar 96
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (47th, Milwaukee, WI, March 27-30, 1996).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Communication; *College Faculty; Feminism; Higher Education; Sex Stereotypes; Student Attitudes; *Student Evaluation of Teacher Performance; *Student Reaction; Student Surveys; Teacher Behavior; Teacher Effectiveness; Teacher Role; *Teacher Student Relationship; *Teaching Styles; Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS *Feminist Pedagogy; *Male Faculty

ABSTRACT

What occurs when male and female teachers violate accepted conventions of the writing classroom by assuming untraditional roles? Numerous studies have shown that when people exhibit behavior contrary to the normal gender-based expectations, the results are less than positive. For the college professor who does not act according to the usual rituals of the classroom, the effect can be disconcerting and frustrating; both the student and the teacher may experience difficulties in interaction, communication, and collaboration. When male professors step out of their traditional and stereotypical roles and become more sensitive to student needs, a shift in classroom behavior occurs as students realize that "individuals do not always fit the patterns associated with their gender." Recent research supports three primary conclusions: male professors in this new role actually receive higher marks than female colleagues on being more "concerned" about students both inside and outside the classroom; because of differences in teaching style, male professors were more harshly criticized than female professors for not acting according to "sex-class linked" behavior; and overall teaching effectiveness was discerned as being inferior to similar courses taught by more traditional male professors. (Contains eight references; survey question with results is appended.) (Author/CR)

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What Happens When Male Professors Enact Feminist Pedagogies?

Dr. Bruce C. Swaffield

Malone College

Canton, Ohio

March 1996

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Abstract

What occurs when male and female teachers violate accepted conventions of the writing classroom by assuming untraditional roles? Numerous studies (Goffman, 1977; Tannen, 1994) have shown that when people exhibit behavior contrary to normal gender-based expectations, the results are anything less than positive.

For the college professor who does not act according to the usual rituals of the classroom, the effect can be disconcerting and frustrating; both the student and teacher may experience difficulties in interaction, communication and collaboration. What happens when male professors step out of their traditional and stereotypical roles and become more sensitive to student needs?

What occurs is a shift in classroom behavior as students adjust to realizing that "individuals do not always fit the patterns associated with their gender" (Tannen, 1994, p. 15). Recent research (Swaffield, 1996) supports three primary conclusions: that male professors in this new role actually receive higher marks than female colleagues on being more "concerned" about students both inside and outside the classroom; that, because of differences in teaching style, male professors were more harshly criticized than female professors for not acting according to "sex-class linked" (Goffman, 1977) behavior; and that overall teaching effectiveness was discerned as being inferior, compared to similar courses taught by more traditional male professors, though there were no marked differences in the subject or the material examined.

What Happens When Male Professors Enact Feminist Pedagogies?

It is mid-December. The semester is almost over and I have just spent the last four days reviewing final research papers, grading final exams, meeting with students who have make-up work to turn in, recording three sets of grades in each of my four classes, and calculating final totals for the term. But my work for this semester is not yet over; I still have to come up with a final grade for about 125 students. The total number of points for each student tells only part of the story; I also need to look at the students' progress, take off for excessive absences and add in points earned for extra credit assignments. Then not only do I have to decide whether the grade is an A, B, C, or something worse, but I have to determine if it should be a B+, B, or B- or a C+, C, or C-. After several more hours, which includes a great deal of self-reflection and forced objectivity, I put down the final grade, satisfied that I have done my best to be fair, impartial and honest.

I now relax and look forward to the next semester. But suddenly, a couple of weeks later, I am mad and angry. I question why I ever went into teaching in the first place. Looking over the course evaluations that have come back from the provost's office, I am shocked and I wonder if there is some mistake. These can't be the evaluations for my class! These are pathetic! Look at this, I mutter as I begin to read the results:

1. The instructor's objectives for the course have been made clear. I ranked in the lower third of all professors

examined.

2. There was considerable agreement between the announced course objectives and what was actually taught. Again, I was in the lower third.

3. The instructor was well prepared for each class. I was in the bottom again -- lower third.

4. The instructor used class time well. Once more, I found myself in the lower third.

I can't believe it; I mumble furiously, throwing the four sets of results down hard on my desk. I feel betrayed! I look at statements in some of the other categories on the evaluations.

1. The instructor was readily available for consultation with students.

2. The instructor seemed genuinely concerned with students' progress and was actively helpful.

3. The instructor made helpful comments on papers or exams.

4. The instructor raised challenging questions or problems for discussion.

In each of these categories I was in the upper third, sometimes as high as the upper 20 percent. But this offers little consolation. Thinking back over the past 14 weeks, I grow more upset and discouraged as I recollect all that I did to help these people:

--I worked with all of my students during the first two classes to set a syllabus that would help them get the most out of this course;

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--I met with each one of them, for 20 to 30 minutes, during the second week of classes so that I could find out more about them and make them feel comfortable with me;

--I was understanding throughout the term, even when papers were turned in late and when people missed quizzes because they didn't feel quite up to coming to class that day;

--I was kind and gave them more than enough time to work on papers and group projects;

--I met with them individually during conferences several times during the semester without cancelling any regular class meetings; some weeks it seemed as though I spent more time at school than I did at home;

--I wrote them frequent notes to remind them about assignments that were due. I didn't pass these out in class; instead, I sent each one out through campus mail!

--I loaned several students my old desk copies of texts because they couldn't afford to buy the book, and I loaned many of my other books to them whenever anyone was having problems doing research in the library;

--In fact, I even helped them in the library with their research; I looked up books and went up to the stacks myself;

--I critiqued hundreds of rough drafts so everyone could earn a higher grade on the final paper;

--I chased after the procrastinators who needed to make up assignments; sometimes, I even called them and pleaded with

them to come in as soon as possible!

So what happened? What went wrong? Maybe they just didn't like the class? Maybe it was the textbook? Maybe it was all those texts and quizzes? Maybe they didn't like me!? I recalled one obnoxious woman who spoke up in front of a class and said her grade on an essay was unfair, that I had been no help at all to her, that she had no idea how I ever came up with a B on the paper. Even when that happened, I was patient and kind. I didn't tell the class that the actual grade was an A, that this woman and I had worked for almost an hour on a rather pathetic rough draft (and I did most of the work), or that she never paid attention to anything that went on in class. She just sat in the back row and worked on assignments for her other classes. I began to wonder if all of my students were turning me off for one reason or another.

What could I have done differently? How could I have changed things so they would have learned more and so the course evaluations wouldn't look like the course had been taught by Attila the Hun. I wanted to be Mother Teresa in a shirt and tie, helping these people obtain a better education, a better life. So where did it all go wrong? I thought of all the things I might have done differently, yet I couldn't see the outcome changing significantly. Perhaps there was nothing I could do, I said to myself in final defeat. But then, slowly, it came to me! Maybe I couldn't have changed the course evaluations even if I would have performed entrechats and set my hair on fire during

each class. Maybe it was something that I couldn't even control -- their attitudes!

How did they see me as opposed to how I saw myself? I knew who I was, but did they? When they walked into the classroom for the first time, did they see this kind, gentle, nurturing person who was willing to do just about anything to help them learn? Or did they see someone dressed like Ross Perot who was going to lecture incessantly and give them too much work to do? It was then that I realized I was dealing, really, with a difference between expectations and realizations. They saw me as a male professor, yet my style of teaching and my demeanor was not typical of other male professors they had encountered in the past.

Studies show that male professors have been seen, for the most part, as authoritarian, demanding, somewhat distant in the classroom and tough graders; female professors, on the other hand, are viewed as sympathetic, understanding, more connected with students in the classroom, and supportive. Such stereotypes, however, are breaking down. But still, attitudes change slowly and society in general has a hard time accepting anything new or different. I am not a traditional male professor and I believe that students have a hard time figuring out just what I am.

Data (Goffman, 1977; Tannen, 1994) reveals that when people exhibit behavior contrary to normal gender-based expectations, they often are rated by others as being less effective, less

intelligent. For the college professor who does not act according to the rituals of the classroom, the result can be disconcerting and frustrating; both the teacher and the student experience difficulties in interaction, communication and collaboration. I began to put together my own survey to see what was going on with my "typical" midwestern students at Malone College in Canton, Ohio.

My work over the past 10 months has yielded a number of interesting results, including the fact that students recognize and appreciate when a male teacher is nurturing and supportive, but they do not feel that even an untraditional male professor is as friendly and interested in them as a typical female professor.

In January 1996, during the first week of classes, an initial survey with 50 questions was distributed to 207 students in 10 different courses; the classes were taught by both female and male professors. In late February, during the midterm point in the semester, a follow-up survey with 20 questions was distributed in the same classes. The follow-up survey in one of the classes taught by a male professor had to be thrown out because the results were skewed. For whatever reason, this particular professor prompted a discussion on gender bias just before the survey was distributed. I do not believe, however, that the overall percentages were affected significantly because even after discarding the skewed results, the follow-up survey was taken by 183 students, just 25 fewer persons than the initial survey one month earlier.

The professors were chosen primarily because of their style of teaching and their approach in the classroom. Male professor 1 (M1) sees himself as "an effective classroom facilitator." Male professor 2 (M2) views himself as "a caring and concerned person who wants to challenge students to think and to learn how to learn for themselves." Female professor 1 (F1) describes herself as "a guide or coach -- as one whose job it is to not only transmit knowledge of content but to also encourage and inspire students toward working independently." Female professor 2 (F2) sees herself as "demanding, but fair; willing to work hard to assist and help students, if they meet me half way and demonstrate <u>their</u> commitment to learning; a sense of humor can make demands and requirements appear easier to bear."

In addition to establishing how the professors saw themselves -- so I had some known data with which to compare responses -- I wanted to find out how the students felt about male and female professors in general. The preliminary results in this area alone, which have been computed in percentages only at this point, show students perceive themselves as not making a distinction in gender. Out of 207 students (roughly 65 percent female, 35 percent male) only 23 percent agreed with the following statements:

1. Based on my experience, I find female teachers to be more understanding than male teachers.
2. I feel more comfortable with a female teacher than I do with a male teacher.

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Only 13 percent agreed with these two statements:

1. I think male teachers are stricter than female teachers.

2. I think that female teachers tend to be more lenient that male teachers.

Finally, just 29 percent agreed that male teachers tend to lecture, while female teachers are more likely to discuss a subject. Certainly there is nothing here, in any of these responses, that seems highly atypical. But what is surprising is what students wrote when they were asked if they preferred a male or female professor and why. There were, of course, representative comments:

--"I really have no preference. I have had both good and bad professors that have consisted of men and women. I would be lying if I said that the gender of a professor doesn't influence me in some way. However, I do try and set by biases aside and the professor do what they are going to do and judge their performance, and not their dress or gender." (Male)

--"I have no preference as to whether a male or female teaches my class. Teachers are still teachers no matter what their gender might be." (Female)

But dozens of students made other comments which raise some interesting questions. These are just a few of their opinions:

--"I am not positive why I favor female teachers. I do know that they tend to be more understanding about personal problems." (Female)

--"I prefer a female because it's easier to relate to someone of the same gender. Females aren't as intimidating; they tend to be more casual and sociable." (Female)

--"Sometimes I feel that female teachers are more receptive to their female students." (Male)

--"I would prefer a male teacher over a female teacher....I've found them to be more easy-going. I think females sometimes think they have something to prove because they are female; therefore, being more rigid and strict." (Male)

--"For me, it all depends on the subject being taught. For math and science, for example, I would prefer a male teacher. But for history, I prefer a female." (Female)

--"Male teachers just seem more understanding about things than females. In the past, I could learn more from a male teacher rather than a female. The female teachers never seemed to like me." (Female)

In total, there were at least 50 out of the 207 responses received in Survey 1 that contained some written indication of teacher preference. While most of the students indicated on the Likert scale that gender made absolutely no difference, they then went on to write that they favored one gender over the other.

In addition, in response to the statement, "The appearance and dress of a teacher influences me," 53 percent of those same students agreed they were affected. Interestingly, the respondents for the most part seem to say one thing while

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believing something else. Gender does seem to make a difference, but students are not always willing to admit their biases. What does it mean when students indicate they are not concerned with a teacher's gender but they are influenced by something as non-threatening as clothing and appearance?

Examining other responses from both the initial (Survey 1) and the follow-up surveys (Survey 2), analyzing at them individually or comparatively, also yields some interesting conclusions (See table). Students were asked to respond to identical statements in both surveys because I also wanted to note whether time, in terms of getting to know the professor, made any difference in students' attitudes and biases. For the purposes of this presentation, I would like to discuss only the results of the follow-up survey (Survey 2). Although there are many interesting comparisons to be made, I am focussing on the differences between the "traditional" male professor (M1) and an unconventional, maternal male professor (M2), as well as the similarities between M2 and those of the two female professors (F1 and F2), both of whom are seen by students as "typical" female teachers.

It is interesting to observe that professor M2 is much closer in all categories to the female professors than to M1. In statement five, for example, the results of M2, F1 and F2 are almost identical, indicating that students see me as "kind and nurturing in the classroom." M1 is seen by less than half of his students as "kind and nurturing."

Similarly, in number four, M2 makes 81 percent of his students "feel comfortable in the classroom" compared to only 59 percent by M1. The results here for M2 are less than for F1 and F2 but considerably higher than M1.

In terms of M2's "willingness to help and assist students," statement two, 64 percent of his students (M2) agreed strongly compared to just 35 percent for M1. In addition, M2 and F2 have almost identical results: 64 percent and 67 percent.

Statement three -- "This teacher is friendly and interested in students" -- reveals that students see M2 as more congenial and amiable than M1, but M2 is far less responsive than either F1 or F2.

Likewise, statement one -- "This teacher is very approachable and receptive to students" -- shows M2 again is higher than M1, but still less than F1 or F2.

So what to all these percentages mean? Conclusively, they prove nothing. But the results of these two surveys do indicate how students see me (M2) and explain, in part, why my course evaluations make me appear as though I have a split personality: half Stephen King and half Forest Gump. The percentages also support other studies that have shown people can be harshly criticized for not acting according to "sex-class linked" behavior (Goffman, 1977) and that when people do not understand the "conventions" -- those rituals common to a particular place -- they react with confusion, fear or even agitation.

I need to make sure that in the future students understand

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who I am and what I expect from them. I can be "kind and nurturing," hospitable, "willing to help and assist" them, "very approachable and receptive," but if I don't take the time to explain and constantly reinforce my philosophy of teaching and how I want my classroom to function, then I am doomed to failure time and time again. I need to break down the stereotypes that exist, whether these be conscious or subconscious. We may argue how high the wall is between us and our students, but it is clear that there still is a significant bias when it comes to gender. How else can one explain statement six -- "I would feel comfortable talking with this teacher about problems I am having outside of the course" -- where M1 and M2 fared much lower than F1 and F2. To put this into perspective, it is important to note that nearly all of the classes consist of significantly more females than males. Hence, most female students still seem to feel more at ease confiding in a female professor rather than a male.

The overall message, at least for me, is that I have to understand how students see me in the classroom and make sure that they do not imagine something that is not there in front of them. I am not a stereotypical male professor; I do not lecture continuously, I do not want distance from my students, I am not a pedant when it comes to grading, and I have no aspirations of becoming an authoritarian or even taking the place of their father when they are here on campus. I simply want to be seen as a good, effective teacher -- one who cares deeply about students

regardless of whether they are female or male.

"WHAT HAPPENS WHEN MALE PROFESSORS ENACT FEMINIST PEDAGOGIES?"

By Dr. Bruce C. Swaffield
Malone College

1. This teacher is very approachable and receptive to students (Strongly Agree).

	Survey 1	Survey 2
M1	27%	38%
M2	47%	50%
F1	65%	72%
F2	84%	65%

2. This teacher is willing to help and assist students (Strongly Agree).

	Survey 1	Survey 2
M1	24%	35%
M2	40%	64%
F1	70%	88%
F2	49%	67%

3. This teacher is friendly and interested in students (Strongly Agree).

	Survey 1	Survey 2
M1	18%	27%
M2	30%	47%
F1	40%	72%
F2	61%	60%

4. Because of this teacher, I feel comfortable in this class (Strongly Agree/Agree).

	Survey 1	Survey 2
M1	48%	59%
M2	59%	81%
F1	100%	96%
F2	78%	90%

5. This teacher is kind and nurturing in the classroom (Strongly Agree/Agree).

	Survey 1	Survey 2
M1	51%	43%
M2	74%	81%
F1	85%	84%
F2	96%	84%

6. I would feel comfortable talking with this teacher about problems I am having outside of the course (Strongly Agree/Agree).

	Survey 1	Survey 2
M1	19%	38%
M2	33%	29%
F1	45%	80%
F2	57%	73%

Female/Male Ratio

	Survey 1	Survey 2
M1	71%-29%	58%-42%
M2	68%-32%	82%-18%
F1	75%-25%	72%-28%
F2	49%-51%	60%-40%
Total Students	207	183

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